

James Woodhouse, "Benevolence, An Ode"

Description

JAMES WOODHOUSE

"BENEVOLENCE, An ODE"

Inscribed to my Friends

Let others boast Palladian skill
The sculptur'd dome to raise;
To scoop the vale, to swell the hill,
Or lead the smooth, meand'ring rill
In ever-varying maze; 5
To strike the lyre
With Homer's fire,
Or Sappho's tender art;
Or Handel's notes with sweeter strains inspire,
O'er Phidia's chissel to preside, 10
Or Titian's glowing pencil guide
Through ev'ry living part.

Ah! what avails it thus to shine,
By ev'ry art refin'd;
Except BENEVOLENCE combine 15
To humanize the mind!
The Parian floor,
Or vivid cieling, fresco'd o'er,
With glaring charms the gazing eye may fire;
Yet may their lords, like statues cold, 20
Devoid of sympathy, behold
Fair worth with want repine,
Or indigence, expire;
Nor ever know the noblest use of gold.

'Tis yours, with sympathetic breast, 25
To stop the rising sigh,
And wipe the tearful eye,
Nor let repining merit sue unblest;
This is a more applausive taste
Than spending wealth 30
In gorgeous waste,
Or

with dire luxury destroying health;

It sweetens life with ev'ry virtuous joy,
And wings the conscious hours with gladness as they fly.

NOTES:

Subtitle “His first two elegies being seen by some gentlemen and ladies in London in manuscript, they made a small subscription for him; and these were the friends he speaks of” [Author’s Note].

1 Palladian A reference to the neoclassical architectural movement inspired by the Italian Renaissance architect, Andrea Palladio (1508-1580). Palladian style was strongly based on symmetry and clarity and remained popular through the mid eighteenth century (*Britannica*).

7 Homer Greek poet, famously known for his epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

8 Sappho “Greek lyric poet (c. 610-570 BCE) greatly admired in all ages for the beauty of her writing style” (*Britannica*).

9 Handel George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), “German-born English composer of the late Baroque era. He wrote the most famous of all oratorios, *Messiah* (1741)” (*Britannica*).

10 Phidias Greek sculptor (fl. c. 490-430 BCE), “artistic director of the Parthenon” and renowned for his colossal statues of Athena and Zeus (*Britannica*).

11 Titian Tiziano Vecellio (or Vecelli) (1488/90-1576) “The greatest Italian Renaissance painter of the Venetian school” (*Britannica*).

17 Parian floor The Greek island of Paros was known for its “fine white marble, prized in antiquity by sculptors” (*OED*).

18 cieling Alternate spelling of “ceiling,” noted in Johnson’s *Dictionary*; *fresco’d* “A kind of painting executed in water-colour on a wall, ceiling, etc. of which the mortar or plaster is not quite dry, so that the colours sink in and become more durable” (*OED*).

28 sue “To make one’s petition or appeal” (*OED*).

Source: *Poems on Several Occasions*, second edition (London, 1766), pp. 24-26. [Google Books]

Edited by Natalie Nunez